

The supposed rationales for the bill continue to change. A few years ago, when majorities of Democrats were mistakenly convinced that foreigners had hacked voting machines and tampered with tallies in 2016, this was marketed as an election security bill. But it keeps morphing to suit new headlines. Lately, it has been called a racial justice bill. Some Senators say it is really a response to some recent State-level legislation, even though their bill predates those bills by multiple years.

A partisan power grab in search of a justification—that is what we have here. Voter turnout last November was the highest in decades. African-American turnout was twice as high in Mississippi as it was in Massachusetts. Democrats' hysterical attacks against the new election law in the State of Georgia have been dismantled even by typically left-leaning fact checkers.

There is no crisis. Our Democratic friends just want the power to rewire our democracy on a partisan basis. S. 1 would take the Federal Election Commission—the bipartisan panel that regulates elections and private citizens' speech—and make it a partisan body run by the Democrats.

It would let Washington Democrats act like a nationwide board of elections on steroids, neutering popular things like voter ID and forcing legalized ballot harvesting onto all 50 States. This bill would let bureaucrats snoop around more in free speech; attack citizens' privacy so dramatically that even the liberal ACLU is unhappy; and even send public funds—get this: public funds—directly to politicians.

Republicans put forward amendments to fix those things. If Democrats had wanted real, bipartisan solutions, Republicans were there, right at the table, and ready, but Democrats voted us down. They wouldn't even let us redirect any of that public money to the opioid crisis. They wanted that cash for their own campaigns.

This partisan power grab failed to advance out of committee for the same reason it must never ever become law as currently written. It will shatter public confidence in our democracy if the Democratic Party decides it can rig the rules.

ISRAEL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, now on a different matter, yet again, air raid sirens have been sounding in Israel. Israeli civilians have been huddling in basements, shelters, and hospital stairwells. Hamas rocket attacks are lighting up the skies, hitting buildings, and terrorizing, injuring, and killing innocent people. Of course, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic jihad receive significant support from Iran.

Fortunately, a remarkable percentage of the incoming rockets have been intercepted in midair by Israel's Iron Dome system. Americans should take some pride of our own in defending our friends with these high-tech defenses,

which we have helped Israel bring online and have advanced our own joint missile defense efforts at the same time. Missile defense is expensive but vital. It is yet another reason I am concerned with this administration's intention to underfund defense.

Whatever complaints Palestinians have with Israel's Government, wanton violence against civilians is completely and totally inexcusable. This is barbaric terrorism, not a legitimate protest; nor is it legitimate for Israel's obsessive critics to suggest any equivalency whatsoever between these inexcusable attacks and Israel's measured and quite targeted response against terrorists.

Yesterday here in Washington, street protesters screamed—listen to this—“Israel is a terrorist state.” On the streets of Washington, they screamed: “Israel is a terrorist state.” Some Democratic Members of Congress echoed that rhetoric almost exactly.

Look, the State of Israel has every right of self-defense. Its national security leaders have continued to display restraint and invest so much in precision and avoiding civilian casualties. That has been the approach of the Israeli Government.

Israel must know that their friends and allies here in the United States stand with them as they seek to restore deterrence, that we support their right to peace and security, and that we will not relax our efforts to hold terrorists and terrorists' supporters to account.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now one final matter, Mr. President. This morning, I will be joining three other congressional leaders to meet with President Biden at the White House. There is certainly no shortage of important business to discuss.

The President campaigned on a promise that his agenda would unite a divided nation. And he inherited a favorable situation. Vaccines were flooding America. Science had proven schools can reopen. Job openings were beginning to pile up.

Republicans sought to continue the 2020 bipartisan streak on COVID relief, but our new President and our Democratic colleagues preferred a one-party approach. They used the end of the pandemic to pass what the President's own staff admitted—admitted—was “the most progressive bill in American history.” Not exactly shopping for consensus.

Republicans were upfront with our concerns. We said these old liberal ideas would slow rehiring, slow down the reopening, and stoke inflation. Of course, just a few minutes ago, the Bureau of Labor Statistics published the most dramatic monthly inflation report in more than a decade. Many of the things American families buy have grown more expensive at a dizzying pace. Last week's incredibly dis-

appointing jobs report showed what happens when Washington taxes working people to pay other people more to stay home.

I am going to discuss these and other concerns with the President today, but I also hope we can begin to come together on pressing issues that should actually unite us.

The last time Congress took comprehensive action on surface transportation infrastructure, 83 Senators signed on. By the way, that bill was produced by Senator Boxer, myself, and Senator INHOFE—a totally bipartisan effort across broad ideological lines. The last time we drilled down on water resources, the margin was 92 to 6. Infrastructure can and should be a bipartisan issue; the same for supporting working families; the same for supporting our national defense.

If the President can remember that he promised to govern for all Americans, not just the far left, if my Democratic friends can remember they have just a 50–50 Senate and a closely divided House—not exactly a sweeping mandate for a socialist agenda—there is much we can deliver together for the country.

I hope today marks the start of a new course correction from this White House and a more successful dialogue across party lines. That is what Americans need, and that is what they deserve.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

MOTION TO DISCHARGE—Continued

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the motion to discharge the Brooks-LaSure nomination.

The Senator from Texas is recognized.

MEDICAID

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, more than 4 million Texans, including half of the children in my State, depend on the stability of the State's Medicaid Program to provide healthcare for themselves and their families. Everything from emergency room visits to mental health care, Medicaid funding

is vital to the health of our most vulnerable friends and neighbors. The same is true in virtually every State across the country.

Unfortunately, a recent move by the Biden administration has put the healthcare of these vulnerable citizens in jeopardy. A few weeks ago, the Biden administration rescinded approval of Texas's 1115 waiver extension. I know that is an obscure reference to most folks, but, basically, here is the long and short of it. The previous administration reached an agreement with the State that will enable billions of dollars to flow to Texans in need. Now, for some reason, the Biden administration is trying to stop it.

The real question is, Why? Why would the Biden administration try to jeopardize the healthcare for 4 million Texans, while the President has consistently talked about ensuring every American has access to quality healthcare. Just 2 weeks ago in his joint session to Congress, he said:

Healthcare should be a right, not a privilege in America.

So why would the administration take an unprecedented action to reduce access to healthcare for some of the most vulnerable people in my State?

Well, the official answer from CMS is to correct an administrative error. But two Federal health officials did an unusual thing in Washington, DC, albeit anonymously. They told the truth. They told the Washington Post that this was done to "push State officials toward accepting the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion." It is pretty bold to admit that this was not about an administrative error at all but about forcing Medicaid expansion onto the State of Texas.

Many people will recall that this was a portion of the Affordable Care Act which was held unconstitutional in an opinion written by Chief Justice Roberts. Chief Justice Roberts said that the Federal Government cannot put a gun to the head of the State and force it to accept the Medicaid expansion since it is a joint program between the Federal Government and the State. Now the administration is engaged in a game of political chicken, with 4 million Texans on the line, and the only ones who are getting hurt are the low-income and uninsured Texans whose healthcare relies on this safety net.

This move by the administration would have been damaging during normal times, but it is even more damaging after this unprecedented year for our healthcare providers. In fact, it is downright reckless. Hospitals and providers in Texas have been pushed to the brink during the pandemic. On top of the additional expenses associated with COVID-19, they have faced serious financial shortfalls from the pause on nonessential medical procedures as well as the hesitancy of patients to seek care because they have been worried about contracting the virus.

Now, more than ever, hospitals and healthcare providers need reliable

funding to plan ahead for their financial stability and uncompensated healthcare costs. If this funding stream goes away or is disrupted, it will directly threaten the healthcare for uninsured Texans and harm the livelihoods of healthcare providers as a whole.

In rural areas and those that are already underserved, the consequences of this move could not be more dangerous. Let's say the Biden administration refuses to change course and Texas loses billions of dollars in Medicaid funding. If uninsured patients in small towns go only to local hospitals for emergency care, they will receive that emergency care because that is another Federal law, called EMTALA. But without the Federal funding to offset those costs, how would these hospitals make ends meet? If these patients aren't paying out of their pockets and the Federal Government is not helping to cover the costs, what will happen?

It is pretty simple, actually. Without funding, the rural hospital will close.

So those same uninsured patients will start visiting the second closest hospital. In my State—it is a big State—that is, maybe, 30 minutes down the road. Maybe it is more than an hour away. Once again, without Federal funding to help cover the costs of treating rising numbers of uninsured patients, what will happen?

Well, that hospital will close too. We will descend into a death spiral of hospitals and healthcare providers that close their doors because they can no longer afford to provide healthcare. The hardest hit patients won't be those with private health insurance; they will be those low-income and uninsured patients, especially in rural and underserved areas.

So the consequences of this irresponsible move by the Biden administration could not be more serious, and they will be felt far and wide because this funding is vital to our healthcare system as a whole.

It is not hyperbole to say that these are going to have life-and-death consequences. While patients in Texas may be the first to get caught in the game of political chicken, they will not be the last. There are only four States that don't have approved or pending 1115 waivers. Four—only four—don't have approved or pending 1115 waivers. Every other State could find itself in the same situation as my State in the coming months.

Florida was granted a waiver around the same time as Texas. What will happen to vulnerable Floridians? Tennessee is already facing legal challenges to its waiver. Will its providers be in jeopardy too? North Carolina, South Carolina, Missouri, Idaho—the list of States that could be impacted by this life-or-death game of chicken goes on and on. The most vulnerable patients in States across the country could lose access to healthcare because of the Biden administration's irrespon-

sible and reckless actions. Something must be done.

To state the obvious, the nominee to lead the CMS, Ms. Brooks-LaSure, did not rescind the Texas Medicaid waiver approval. In fact, she has not been confirmed as yet, but before her nomination can advance, Members of the Senate deserve a commitment from the administration that it won't try to force the hand of States by putting the healthcare of millions on the line.

If we don't step up now and push back against this reckless move, what State will be next? How far will the administration go—in the words of Chief Justice Roberts—to put a gun to the heads of the States, forcing them to dance to Washington's tune?

I have asked the administration to work with Texas to ensure that millions of impacted individuals won't lose access to healthcare, but, so far, there has been zero progress. The administration has been unwilling to provide any assurance that an agreement with Texas could be reached before the end of this fiscal year—something that would have dire consequences for our providers, especially those in mental and behavioral health.

As a reminder, the CMS said the only issue with the Texas waiver was an administrative error. Now it won't even commit to providing reliable care for these patients. This unprecedented action by the CMS threatens the security of the Texas Medicaid Program. It disrespects the continuity of this agreement, and it erodes the partnership between the State and the Federal Government.

I think it also violates the constitutional authority of the States. The Federal Government is one of delegated powers, with the rest retained by the States and we the people. That was the basis upon which the Supreme Court of the United States struck down the compulsory Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. Yet now the administration seeks to do through the backdoor what it could not do through the front door. This sets a dangerous precedent of the administration's undoing of agreements, negotiated in good faith between the States and the Federal Government, for purely political reasons, and it could have cascading consequences across the country.

I appreciate Ms. Brooks-LaSure's experience in working with States to develop these waivers as well as her willingness to talk to me about this issue, but she doesn't have any authority to force the Biden administration to undo its terrible and reckless mistake, at least not yet. Until Texas can receive a waiver and an assurance that this action will be rectified and the rug will not be pulled out from under our poorest patients, I cannot support this nomination.

I urge my colleagues to stand up for the healthcare of their most vulnerable populations and push the administration to find an alternate path forward.

If they are willing to do this to my State, they will do it to your State and every other State in the country.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Democratic whip.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, they did it in a closed room. No one in the public was allowed to watch. They did it by a voice vote so that there would be no physical record of how individual Congressmen—how they voted. And they decided to remove a Member of the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives this morning in that fashion. These proud, courageous disciples of Donald Trump didn't want to be on the record publicly as to where they stood on the fate of Congresswoman CHENEY.

This is the same Congresswoman CHENEY who was reelected to leadership in the House just a few weeks ago. This is the same Congresswoman CHENEY who is one of the most ideologically conservative Members of the House. She voted with President Trump nearly 93 percent of the time while she was in office. With a name like CHENEY, it is hard to question her Republican credentials.

No, the decision, in private, in secret this morning by a voice vote, was not about a disagreement over policy but the issue as to whether or not LIZ CHENEY dares to tell the truth.

She refused to defend or ignore the big lie that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump, and in today's Republican Party, it seems like that is all that is necessary for grounds for removal.

More than 6 months after the 2020 election was held, it is clear that the big lie has been spread in a big way. And that lie is not just a threat to the future of the Republican Party, it is a threat to our democracy.

Since the start of this year, Republican State legislatures, inspired by Donald Trump's big lie that the election was stolen, have introduced more than 360 bills with restrictive voting provisions in 47 States—one of the most notorious examples, the State of Georgia.

Remember, the State of Georgia—hotly contested in the 2020 election, and then the Trump troops came in and went to court over and over and over again, suggesting there was election fraud and dishonesty in the Georgia election. And the Georgia election officials, virtually all Republicans, stood up and said it was an honest election, a close one, but it was an honest election. They were challenged over and

over again, to the point where the former President of the United States, while he was still in power, called an election official in Georgia and basically threatened him; that if he didn't change the votes and give President Trump what he thought he needed to win, he would pay a price for it. It went that far.

To his credit, this election official stood up and said: The results are accurate and I stand by them and I am not going to change it.

It went that far.

And there was a big turnout in Georgia. In fact, there was an amazing turnout in the runoff elections for the two Senate seats won by JON OSSOFF and RAPHAEL WARNOCK, our colleagues here in the U.S. Senate. So even with that big turnout and even with the certainty that that election was honest from start to finish, the Georgia Legislature decided to change the laws for voting in Georgia. It wasn't volume they were looking for; it was loyalty. They wanted to make sure that the voters in the future would be friendlier to the Republicans.

And so they changed the Georgia election law and made it harder for people, particularly people of color, young people, the elderly, and people of limited means, to vote. That law—that Georgia voting law—represents a blatantly political effort to subvert our democratic process.

Republicans of conscience know this, but it seems there is no future for those Republicans, if we reflect on the vote taken this morning in the House of Representatives Republican caucus. LIZ CHENEY's expulsion from her role in the Republican conference is just the latest example of what happens to Republican officials who dare to speak the truth about the 2020 election. They are not only silenced, they are purged from the party ranks.

Our own colleague Senator MITT ROMNEY, not long ago a Republican candidate for President of the United States, was just censured by a Republican county organization in his State because he refuses to support the big lie of Donald Trump. The unfortunate reality is that, today, the loudest voices within the Republican Party have joined Donald Trump in declaring war on the basics of our democracy.

That is why we in Congress need to do something. Immediately. This week, the Rules Committee held a markup on a measure that would combat voter suppression and protect our democratic process. It is known as the For the People Act.

This is a democracy defense plan. It will ensure that all eligible Americans can exercise their constitutional right to vote without facing burdensome barriers at the ballot box. The For the People Act invests in election infrastructure, provides State and local officials with resources to run safe, secure elections.

In addition to combating voter suppression, the bill also reforms a broken

campaign finance system that gives wealthy donors and big corporations far too much influence over our electoral process. By passing it, we will say, loud and clear, that America's elections are not for sale to the highest bidder. Above all, this legislation will strengthen the integrity of our democratic process and put more power in the hands of the people.

Now, I know some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are attacking the bill as a "takeover" of the Nation's election system. The truth is, American elections have already been taken over by special interests. This bill will start to restore our democracy and make it more accessible to every eligible American.

I would love to know what my Republican colleagues find so objectionable about the legislation's core provisions. Listen, it automatically registers American voters when they get a driver's license; it guarantees at least 15 days of early voting; ends partisan gerrymandering nationwide; and brings greater transparency to the campaign finance system. These are reforms that will make our democracy whole again, and they are desperately needed, particularly at this moment in our history because in the world's greatest democracy, people shouldn't have to wait in line for hours on end to have their voices heard. And yet that is the reality for voters in States just like Georgia. And it is not an accident; it is intentional. Look at the people standing in the lines, and you can understand why they are being discouraged from voting by waiting so long.

Let's be honest about these restrictive voting provisions being passed in State legislatures across the country, because they are grounded in one lie after another. The truth is that President Trump's own officials at the Department of Homeland Security declared that the 2020 election was the most secure election in American history.

The truth is, judges across the country, including many appointed by President Donald Trump, threw out more than 63 lawsuits that his followers filed, challenging the results of last year's elections. Why? There was no evidence, no basis in fact for the big lie.

But the truth is, the big lie won't just die with the 2020 election. It will sow distrust in our electoral system for years to come, unless my Republican colleagues act with courage. A few have done so. This morning, one paid a heavy price.

The question to all of us is: Are we prepared to either discredit democracy or defend it?

Rejecting the big lie is the defense of our democratic process. We have to join together in making certain that every American's right to vote is protected.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.